



## TOTTERDOWN BAPTIST CHURCH

### POLICY AND GUIDELINES FOR MARRIAGE

In 2014 the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 came into force in England, though non-conformist churches such as Baptists are exempted from this legislation. Totterdown Baptist Church remains registered to conduct only traditional Christian marriage. However, we acknowledge and respect a variety of views on this subject within our church, we welcome free dialogue in an atmosphere of love and mutual respect and we encourage tolerance of people with different sincerely-held positions.

The agreed policy of tbc continues to be that we uphold the biblically-based Christian principle that marriage is a binding, public, legal commitment between one man and one woman for life. We therefore urge all members to maintain the highest standard of Christian morality in sexual matters, and those considering marriage to take very seriously the biblical exhortation to faithfulness and sexual fidelity.

Whilst we uphold the ideal of traditional Christian values concerning marriage, we acknowledge that the reality of today's world is vastly different from the situation pertaining thirty or forty years ago. We recognise that the pressures faced by people today result in a high proportion of couples deciding to cohabit, or in married relationships ending in divorce, and that such people may approach the church for marriage.

The policy of the church is:

- To accept all people as they are, but gently and lovingly point them to Jesus and encourage them to live by biblical standards.
- To strongly urge a man and a woman who are currently living in an intentional, permanent relationship to seriously consider taking marriage vows.
- That marriage may only take place if the couple have attended a preparation course run by the Minister and/or other appointed persons, and have satisfied the Minister that they understand the serious nature of marriage vows, and what Christian marriage entails.
- That people who have previously been divorced may, at the discretion of the Minister, be married in church. Exceptions may include when the present relationship is the cause of divorce or when there has not been a considerable time since the divorce of either partner.
- That the Minister should have discretion to make pastoral judgments in each individual situation of a couple who approach the church for marriage, but ...
- That the Minister should consult with the Deacons and Elders before any final decisions regarding marriage requests are made. This is to ensure both accountability of, and support for the Minister in carrying out pastoral duties.
- Cohabiting couples requesting church membership should normally be expected to be married before being accepted into membership.

### POLICY AND GUIDELINES FOR FUNERALS

Funerals should be conducted for all who approach the church, regardless of faith background. It will be made clear that the service will be conducted by a Christian Minister, but that sensitivity will be shown to the family concerned. The service will be an opportunity to proclaim Christian hope, whilst also offering pastoral care and support for grieving relatives and friends in the pre- and post-funeral visits.

No fees will be charged for members of the church, or anyone involved in the fellowship. Fees may be charged at the standard rate for anyone not connected with the fellowship.

The Minister has the right to claim expenses and to keep the remainder of the fee at his/her discretion.

*These Guidelines, which supercede any previous rules, were agreed by Totterdown Baptist Church Deacons at a meeting held on April 30 2007 and by the Church Members on May 31 2007.*

*Revised after discussions at a Church Meeting on September 18<sup>th</sup> 2012.*

*Revised after discussions at a Church Meeting on January 20<sup>th</sup> 2015 and approved by a Church Meeting on May 19<sup>th</sup> 2015.*